On score work and the performer
an interview with Unn Faleide, dancer at Cullberg, Stockholm 2023

- It is February 19th, 2023. I, Maja Hannisdal, am sitting here with Unn Faleide in Unn's living room. It's 7:23 pm. I have prepared some questions. Okay, I will read to you what I'm trying to find out in this interview, which can be summarised in the following two research questions: "What is the limiting, and what is the liberating effects of score work for the performer?" "Where is authorship for the performer in score work?"
  So; Hello Unn! Nice to be here on your sofa with you today!
- Ditto.
- Can you tell me about your typical working day?
- I come to work. I usually say that I'm warming up, but really I just need some alone time where I sit in my lounge, my own little prison cell without a window. I sit on my little bunk and do some journaling, and then I go to warm up.
- How long do you sit on the bunk?
- I spend at least 20 minutes writing by hand. To be alone with myself. Then I start warming up the body and soul in the yoga room, and then it's 9 o'clock, and by then I've already been at work for probably 45 minutes. Then there is a class. Some random stuff. An hour and fifteen. Then we go into the studio and we work in the studio with a lunch break and several smaller breaks until five o'clock. And then you do it again, and again, and again. Until death takes you. No, haha, but Monday to Friday at least. Why?
- Why?
- Yes, why? Does that shed light on the matter of score work? What the day looks like?
- No, it's mostly for context, but I do think it's exciting to hear that you're warming up by writing and being at alone. That could maybe..?
- Yes I think there is a clue there Sherlock.
- Yes, maybe.
- That's what I thought. I became a little aware of that myself now.

- When working in this repertory company, how much score work do you encounter?
- Do you mean text-based, written scores that is interpreted? All the performances we do are in a way score-based tasks that have been more or less set. Depending on how you define score, I would say that basically everything we do is score-based. I encounter it everywhere I twist and turn, every nook and cranny. But if there is a strict understanding of what a score is..? No? Okay. No, then I encounter it all the time.
- You can decide how you choose to define «score».
- The way I understand scores, it's about formulating tasks... yes, you formulate something that you interpret. And that's what we do. Right now we are making a performance that is slightly less score based than what we usually work with, a fairly set material. But even in that process there are elements of it. What was it I formulated it was?
- That it is interpretation work for the performer.
- Yes.
- And it is constant?
- Yes, permeating.

- Do you have any examples of the process in such work?
- We have worked quite a lot with Deborah Hay, and then we work with a score that is written in text in advance, completely independent of either you or me. Sometimes you get to read the score, sometimes she doesn't even bother to give you the score. She just reads

aloud sentence by sentence. One must remember it and interpret it in the moment. We do that for a week or two. Then it's supposed to be internalized. It's very individual what you remember. For example, "In two minutes and thirty seconds, everyone will walk across the stage" or something like that. But then it is up to you what two minutes and thirty seconds is. What is exciting is that there is nothing objective to deal with. She tries to take away as much objectivity as possible and leave as much room for interpretation as possible. But with more atypical scoring situations, it is usually the case that you get a specific rhythm or a physical task or something like that, and you interpret that. You make a solo or you make some stuff, or you improvise together or so on, and then it gets kind of set, but it's set enough that it's not set. But now I feel that we are going into what is a practice-based choreography, what is a score-based choreography, what is an improvisation, what is the difference between the three things, and I don't think you should ask me that, or I think it's very difficult to answer. But you didn't ask that.

- No, I haven't asked about that, but do you think it's important? Do you feel that it is important for you as a performer in relation to what you end up doing on stage?
- No no! No, it's not, and I don't feel that I have that much greater freedom when I have a loose score that I can relate to and feel and negotiate with on stage, or if I have a very strict task. "On that cue you have to do this and that, and bend down and walk around..." I feel that experientially and almost spiritually, it's a bit the same. I do not express anything more if I can choose to take a crazy spin on the task I am given. I'm working on how to implement, not necessarily like "what choices can I make?". I think I'm trying to say that I'm more interested in the performative than the choreographic choice. You can easily end up choreographing large portions of a score-based piece as a performer, I'm not saying you do either one or the other, I just think I get more of a kick out of thinking about how I approach the task, more than like "Wow! Radical! I made a diagonal!"

- When you get a new task to solve, do you have any tools you particularly like to start with?
- I think I'm very influenced by Deborah Hay and Bauer and Shosha and that gang. It's a bit like "start before you're ready": Ready, fire, aim.
- Tell me more about that.
- I think that for me dance is not rocket science, nor should it be. I believe that the body, or body, mind, the whole shebang, knows what to do and how. I am not very interested in over-analysis, or leaning into an intellectual way of interpreting something that is supposed to be embodied knowledge. "Start before you know you've started". Jeanine Durning, who I work with, use to say "Pull the rug out!". That's how I like to work.

- If you are prepping to do score work, is there anything in particular that you find useful? Now you've already said that you like to just suddenly be in it, "pull the rug out", does that mean it's an active non-prep?
- Yes maybe. I think I have an intuitive belief that everything we need is already here, and that the best thoughts come when you're not thinking about what you're supposed to. That's true in relation to neuroscience as well. When you shower you are much smarter than when you sit down to really focus on a task. And I think that it is important to stress as little as possible, especially when it comes to dance work.

- When you mention that you write at the beginning of the day, do you see that as prep work for the working day, or just for life in general?
- Both. You dance with people. Being with people all the time is what we humans are made for, but it is also tiring. To deal with social dynamics, to deal with different cultures and emotions, and for everyone having to go hard and be big egos and be geniuses and interpret and so on. Then it's a good idea to take some time to yourself, just ground oneself.
- Is there a particular writing assignment you go for?

- Yes, just like "empty yourself". Go to the bathroom kind of, the morning poo.
- That's sounds lovely.
- You just go ahead and take a morning poo yourself. Borrow that.
- Yeah, I think I'll steal that poop right away. The thing about being in a situation when you have to... "produce" is the wrong word, but you have to keep the engine running, so to speak, when it is a big part of the job to constantly come up with new things. Is there a link between that and such a writing practice, this kind of morning poo? It's one thing to know your limits or just to empty yourself as you mentioned, but could it also be a cleanse to get rid of old gunk so you're ready to start fresh, or some kind of generator you crank up, or is it neither?
- Interesting that you ask, I hadn't thought of that. I think it's a bit of both. I don't think you can get rid of things, but I think you can make things visible and become aware of them and that becomes a kind of palette cleanser at the beginning of the day. But I wanted to say one thing about working so closely with other people when it comes to giving something artistic, at least relatively often. I feel that it becomes a lot of fragile egos wandering about, and that is because we are human. I don't buy that myth about dancers being so much more drama queens than other people, but it gets pretty fragile in our line of work. So I think that the writing is also just a grounding, "I am me, and that's enough". Lay your own foundation. Insecurity spreads. It's contagious. You don't get rid of insecurity by saying "I'm not insecure" or by counteracting by saying "I'm so good". As soon as you admit to yourself that you are a small human, it is easier to meet other small humans and then it is easier to work together. I think that has something to do with it. Emotions and such.

- I imagine a situation where a choreographer comes in with a very strong physical style, who might want a free interpretation of whatever it may be, but then it feels like that choreographer's style has to be involved in some way.
- I feel like you describe every choreographer.
- Yes? And then you have people like Deborah, who comes with something very text-based, "interpret this text freely", but then she comes in with a style that she has done for many, many years, and then you might feel that style is tagging along somehow. I was wondering in such a situation, do you have any thoughts about your own form in relation to the choreographer's form?
- I'm having a lot of trouble with this. I find it so annoying that almost every choreographer creates these scores or tasks as a supposedly objective practice, which is open for interpretation, "your interpretation is important", and then you have to be whipped into shape afterwards. It's perfectly fine, the part that you have a practice here, you also have an aesthetic regime or whatever you want to call it on the other side and they overlap a little, but that it's not the same. I just find it so annoying with those who won't admit it! Who feel that the practice or the language they have created is enough. And who are unable to put into words that "the practice produces this result in my body. I see that in your body it produces a slightly different result. It doesn't fit into my piece so let's try something else." But there isn't much of that language around, and I find that quite frustrating.

- That right there is a layer close to the core of the onion for me. Nice what you said about the aesthetics. Maybe that's easily forgotten in an assignment? Unless the task is to just look exactly the same!
- Yes! "Copy me!» Perhaps that is the difference in basing your choreographic project in something that can be written down as something intellectual. I think it's perfectly fine that it's "copy me"! Why wouldn't that be okay? Because that experiment you've done where you've said those words to yourself, and then you've gotten that result, obviously doesn't happen in anyone else's body unless they're just lying. When someone says "Egg", it doesn't get the same result for everyone, and that's a problem if you want something very specific.

- But what do you do about that? There's someone who obviously wants you to look like them, but you get a task that you can interpret freely. Do you have any strategies for that?
- The worst case of this happened earlier in my career, but even then I brought it up with the choreographer and said in the group, "Hey. This practice that you have created, it does not make me get the result that you want. I feel like you're asking for two different things." And then there were some uncomfy vibes, haha! And then I think we agreed that "Yes, yes, whatever. We call it a practice, even though it really isn't." But now I feel that people have become a little better at understanding that problem. If things look different than what they want, then they say "Okay, that was good, but just add this and this thing that are completely concrete things that I just want because I think it looks good." And it is much easier to deal with. But yes, I think the vast majority of dancers have an incredibly good ability to assimilate instead of saying "The score you're trying to give us is a bit unnecessary." We manage to bypass these unpleasant situations quite easily.

- What are your thoughts on authorship and ownership as a performer?
- I think it is strange that we have the same crediting format after each process when it is something that should be reassessed for each project. How do you want to be credited, what is your contribution here? Maybe we should divide the credits into parts? «Solo number 1», «solo number 2», like they did in the old days? "That tree that stood in the background there".. etc. "The movement *Hands above the head* was made by Unn." You could almost make it a project in itself. I don't know if it's that interesting, but what *is* interesting is how uncreative that process is! And there is no choreographer today who creates a piece alone. But I believe that there is a very big difference between the materiality, what occurs in the meeting between each other, and coming up with the idea and being the initiator of a project. There is a very big difference in the investment done considering the though process. There are some choreographers who come with an extremely large amount of material and a lot of thoughts, and there are also choreographers who come with a very thin… "lunch box", with dry bread and a piece of cheese, and say "make it gourmet". It's complicated. I think you have to assess project by project and not rely on already set formats and structures considering crediting.

- What usually happens if you don't like what a choreographer wants you to do?
- I know this one! Then I do it anyway! Unless it's hurtful for the body and soul and overall health.
- How far can the soul be stretched?
- It can be stretched quite far. I manage to think about little details and just be in it. I just do the job. And you find joy in tiny choices. Even if I have to do something I don't want to do, maybe I can do it a little bit more in my tone? A slightly different colour?

- Have you experienced losing your agency as a performer in other people's scores?
- No, even in restrictive roles, extremely set things, I feel I can find room to move. "Lose agency" is quite interesting because, I don't know... It's a question of how much agency you have as a performer. I think in my work situation, I have a lot of agency because I am a lifetime employee dancing in a company that is part of the workers union and has a lot of rights. I don't quite know where to place myself concerning artistic agency. If I create material and I want to take it in this direction, but I'm not allowed because the choreographer wants something else, then I don't feel I'm losing my artistic agency because that wasn't the agreement in the first place. The agreement was that I would start cooking something and then we will negotiate together where we are going with it. You can be disappointed in a process, and that is sad, but that is not me loosing my agency. But you also don't give away the best pearls to certain choreographers! There are times when you hold back a little on the guns. You also share a little extra of the good seeds with those you like.

- What do you find most enjoyable in task-based work?
- I feel like it leaves room to surprise myself in the long run because it's so generative. You may have done it quite a few times, and still it's like "Wow! New material! Here we go!" If it is a good score, it provides fertile ground to really grow for a long time. And a bad score does the opposite. Then you are stuck in the muck.

- It seems that in most of the things brought up here, there is an underlying thread about social conditions. You talk very little about artistry, The Arts with a capital A. That seems to come in second for you?
- I don't believe in art with a capital A. I believe in people. It's always about people. That's what it's all about. Social relationships and respect and love. Art is just a by-product. So you're probably right, yes.